

C.M.S. NEWS-LETTER

Dear fellow-Member of C.M.S.,

A much-travelled friend of mine is good enough to allow me to read his travel-diaries. In his record of one recent journey I read the following sentences:

... he was a missionary of the American Board and he asked me the question so frequently asked, 'I live perfectly comfortably. What is the equivalent of the pioneer missionary sacrifice of earlier days?' I said that it was 'the sustained dedication of talent or jobs in Christ's service, which would bring little public regard, personal security or professional advancement'. But of course the question is of wider application and needs more thorough examination. It would be an admirable subject for one of Dr. Warren's News-Letters."

That closing sentence put me fairly on the spot! But friendship has its obligations even when, as in this case, they are embarrassments. For months I have been pondering this invitation to write on the modern equivalent for 'sacrifice' in missionary service. I do not need to list the reasons for my hesitation. They must be obvious. Supreme among them is, of course, the fact that the word 'sacrifice', for the Christian, the shortest possible route to the foot of the Cross. And at that location Christians do not talk about sacrifice, but simply worship the self-sacrificing Son of God. One of the greatest missionaries of all time, David Livingstone, spoke for all real missionaries when he said, "I have never made sacrifice". He said that from the perspective of the Cross.

Yet the question of that American missionary demands an answer. After all it was the Christ himself, on the way to the Cross, who said starkly and without compromise: "Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he must take up his cross, and come with me." (St. Mark 8. 34 N.E.B.)

"Leaving self behind" means 'sacrifice'. And we all know that it hurts like hell! Let us then take those simple words from our latest English translation of the New Testament and try to see what they mean. "Leave self behind . . . and come with me." For some, though probably only for a few, those words will spell high drama. For the vast majority they will mean a secret shared only between God and themselves, what my friend

MORE NON-CONFORMISTS!

The great protest
The great refusal
The great surrender
The great challenge

meant in his diary by the words "sustained dedication".

This NEWS-LETTER is addressed to those who, like myself, find "leaving self behind" very heavy going indeed, but who genuinely want an answer to that American missionary's question, wherever our service may be.

THE GREAT PROTEST

On this subject, if we are to get anywhere, we must avoid super-charged emotion. Let me then begin my discussion with that unknown American missionary and with the readers of this NEWS-LETTER, by giving a quotation which has, for some curious reason, haunted my memory ever since I first read it as an undergraduate more than thirty years ago. The passage comes from A. E. Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth—Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* and in particular from the chapter entitled "Poverty". Professor Zimmern is trying in this chapter to get his readers to project themselves into the real atmosphere of ancient Athens. After contrasting our modern amenities with the lack of them in that Athenian world he says:

"We must learn . . . to warm ourselves over a pot of ashes, to judge open-air plays and lawsuits on a cold winter's morning, to study poetry without books, geography without maps, and politics without newspapers. In a word we must learn to be civilized without being comfortable. Or rather we must learn to enjoy the society of people for whom comfort meant something very different from motor-cars and arm-chairs, who although or because they lived plainly and austere and sat at the table of life without expecting any dessert, saw more of the use and beauty and goodness of the few things that were vouchsafed them—their minds, their bodies, and Nature outside and around them. Greek literature, like the Gospels, 'is a great protest against the

modern view that the really important thing is to be comfortable'."

I want to dwell a little longer on this matter of 'being comfortable'. I think there is something here which goes very deep indeed. We who are members of 'affluent societies' can do well with the reminder which our Lord gave to the man who was property-conscious. "Beware! Be on your guard against greed of every kind, for even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life." (*St. Luke* 12. 15 N.E.B.) The New English Bible is still new enough to shock us. Ponder its rendering of *I John* 3. 17—"if a man has enough to live on, and yet when he sees his brother in need shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him?" 'Enough to live on' not 'more than enough' is what it says!

The accent so far may seem to have been laid on material comfort. That is a 'seeming' only. The amenities of an affluent society are by no means only material ones. The following quotation shows the transition to a much more subtle level of living. An American missionary recruit arrived in Japan in the year 1960. Soon after arrival he was asked by a group of missionaries to interpret to them the mind of American students today. The full report of what he said can be read in *The Japan Christian Quarterly* for October 1960. It is a very illuminating statement and deserves to be read in full, it is altogether relevant to our theme. I only presume to quote an extract from it because, with slight changes of emphasis here or there, it is substantially true as a description of the situation in Britain. The extract reads:

"Church people have good sense, usually, and sincerity, almost always. But they lack, at best, information and, at worst, fire. So, I think, does the American college student. Like most people, Christian and non-Christian, he wants a life of comfort for others, but not at the expense of his own. He will gladly give the shirt off his back, provided there are twenty more in his dresser. . . . He has money and he has energy; he has time and he has talent. What he lacks, plainly, is the will to be crucified in small ways daily, because that brings only unrequited pain. Backing all his high morals, it seems to me, is the clear sense that he who loses his life will lose it. This is partially understandable. As a human spirit he has been formed mainly, let us say, by his family and the 'church on a corner', which are not always the same thing as the Cross-torn Christ. He has never been smashed in such a way that his remaking is instantly imperative.

"Apparently, he has never been involved that kind of communal relationship in which one is as willing to live as to die for another as unconditionally as possible. The student has, thus, that admirable veneer of morality which makes democracy practicable, but lacks the understanding that that is enough."

The writer, identifying himself as one of this student generation goes on to say:

"It is not that he basically lacks energy, willingness, for in time of war or natural disaster he will ordinarily respond fully to what he is and has. What we all find dismal is to live within the context of countless small tensions. No one event seems to demand an all-out effort. Like Gulliver we are bound by a whole network of petty tensions that sap our energies to the good end, so far as we know, and so live in frustration and convey that message to our fellows."

That is a most moving and frank portrayal of the spiritual dilemma of a very large section of the student world of the West. This same creeping paralysis is invading the student world of Asia, and may not be long delayed in Africa. Let us be quite clear the 'have nots' pursue 'comfort' with the same passion as the 'haves' and with more excuse!

THE GREAT REFUSAL

Perhaps the freedom of the Christian really consists in his continued refusal to conform to the current pattern of values in his refusal to confuse comfort with civilisation or Christianity. One cherished form of comfort is being fashionable, being popular, conforming to that particular public opinion one values most. The 'foreign' missionary today will, except in very rare cases, have to abandon that particular comfort. He is unlikely to be admired. He is very likely to be thought of as a fool by his family and friends. Perhaps the most uncomfortable of all will be the experience of having his motives misinterpreted by many in the Church of adoption. Perhaps the time has come when the witness of Christians everywhere will be seen to reside in a willingness to 'leave self behind' at that seemingly pedestrian level. That is not to advocate a new legalism, a new puritanism, but a readiness to recover a New Testament attitude.

I have in front of me as I write a letter from one of our missionaries which throws light on our subject, and would seem to come in at this point in the argument. He writes:

"As the size of the community has increased so has the pressure of people upon us

creased also, and with this has gone an ever bigger opportunity for glorifying and for praising our Lord in every moment of each day. One of the biggest challenges which we all find, I think, is to remain gracious and joyful and above all at peace when eight or nine people are simultaneously making a claim upon one. This happens several times every day—someone requires a tool, another some nails, another some advice about erosion control, another some first aid for a jagged wound, the carpenter wants me to see his work, a Church elder to discuss who is to go forward for baptism, the foreman to report on some piece of work on the farm and so on. In no time under such conditions living from day to day covers far too broad a span. It is living in the second that matters, sufficient unto the next second is the evil thereof. . . . As we live amidst the 'crush of people' we wonder more and more at the power and the grace which sustained Jesus as people thronged him with requests from morning to night."

Behind that extract I think it is possible to discern something of that "sustained dedication of talent for jobs in Christ's service" which my friend gave as part of the modern equivalent for the 'pioneer missionary sacrifice of earlier days'. It also illustrates another attitude to being like "Gulliver . . . bound by a whole network of tugging, petty tensions". Interestingly enough it exposes the utter irrelevance of comfort as a factor giving value to the life of the spirit and the work of God's Kingdom.

THE GREAT SURRENDER

My friend, in his diary, went on to say that the modern missionary must expect 'little public regard, personal security, or professional advancement'. I am going to allow extracts from the letters of three missionaries to comment on that judgment of my friend, a judgment which I believe to be profoundly true, and one with which every missionary today must come to terms. By doing so they will, perhaps, make their major contribution to the life of the Church in which they serve.

The *first* extract is from a graduate teaching in a girls' secondary school in Africa. She writes:

"If anyone asked me what I had achieved in the last three years I should find it very difficult to reply, and I could easily be persuaded on the level of argument that therefore I might as well not be here. . . . But beyond the level of argument I know that the work of a teacher is to be *there* and to put the truth of God in the way of those whom he teaches and leave them free to discover the wonder and marvel of it for themselves, if possible without noticing who put it in their way."

—"little public regard"

The *second* extract is from a missionary doing administrative work in the Middle East. Commenting on the disadvantages of all kinds of 'short term' service he writes of—

"the enormous advantage the missionary has when he offers himself unreservedly to the service of the country, for as long as God wants him to stay there. This is an immense help to him, in that he feels he has time to grow and to know, to learn and to teach and that success is not nearly so important as faithfulness. . . ."

—"little personal security" as the world judges it. The country from which that letter comes is chronically teetering on the edge of revolution.

The *third* extract is from a medical missionary in South Africa. I wish I could quote the whole of this letter. Towards the end of it he says:

"More and more we must try to give the lie to nonsense about race and colour, and to us here this has meant a conscious growing together as fellow-workers in the Church for the benefit, as we hope, of our patients and our neighbours. It is not easy to do this; sometimes you fall to wondering whether you can see any hope of success at all, and then again, often unexpectedly, comes a moment of encouragement which gives abundant courage to go hammering on year after year with before you, a vision of a more perfect community, a cell of the Body of Christ. . . . There is work to do; enormous maddening, meaningful, back-breaking work. For its completion are required Christians who are neither ashamed of the Gospel nor shy of unrelenting work; who are prepared, if needs be, to slough off prejudices about white superiority; who are willing to try to love rather than criticize, to give rather than to take, and to barter professional advancement (for that is what such a step may mean) for Christian obedience. The salary is small, but the wages unexpectedly high."

—"little professional advancement".

THE GREAT CHALLENGE

Refusal to conform to the current pursuit of comfort, to keeping up with the Jones's, to setting a premium on personal security, to making an idol of professional advancement—that is part of the missionary challenge of today in terms of 'leaving self behind'. That is why this NEWS-LETTER is concerned with 'Situations vacant' and why its title is 'Wanted—more Non-conformists!'

Your sincere friend,

Max Warner

General Secretary.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The Greek Commonwealth—Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens, by A. E. Zimmern (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 3rd Edition revised, 1922, now out of print).

****The Mind of American Students Today***, by William Elliott, published in *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, October 1960.

(Continued at foot of page)

If undelivered please return to
6 Salisbury Square, London, E.C.4

For those who would like to study further how it is possible to be uncomfortable and yet Christian, much help and inspiration will be found in the following

††***A Christian in East Germany***, by Johannes Hamel (S.C.M. Press, 1960). 8s. 6d. by post 9s. 3d.

††***Letters and Papers from Prison***, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (S.C.M. Press, 1953). 15s., by post 16s. 6d. Paperback Fontana 2s. 6d., by post 2s. 11d.

The Letter of Paul to all those of God's people, incorporate in Christ Jesus, who live at Philippi—see The New English Bible or even the King James version!

† May be ordered from C.M.S. Publishing Dept.

* May be read in the Library.

‡ May be borrowed from C.M.S. Library.